KEITH OF THE-BORDER

A TALE OF THE PLAINS

By RANDALL PARRISH Author of "MY LADY OF THE SOUTH,"
"WHEN WILDERNESS WAS KING," etc.

Illustrations by DEARBORN MELVILL.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

An Unexpected Meeting.

Keith paused at the landing, looking down into the described office, almost tempted to return and force Hawley into a confession of his pur-It was easy for him to conceive what would be the final result of this interview between the artistic cambler and Miss Maclaire. In spite of the vague suspicion of evil which the plainsman had implanted within the woman's mind, the other possessed the advantage, and would certainly improve it. All conditions were decidedly in his favor. He merely needed to convince the girl that she was actually the party sought, and she would go forward, playing the game he desired, believing herself totally unconscious of any The very simplicity of it rendered the plot the more dangerous, the more difficult to expose. Hawley had surely been favored by fortune in discovering this singer who chanced to resemble Hope so remarkably, and who, at the same time, was in such ignorance as to her own parentage. She would be ready to grasp at a straw, and, once persuaded as to her identity and legal rights, could henceforth be trusted implicitly as an ally. Realizing all this, and comprehend-

ing also how easily Hawley would win her confidence and overcome his warning by denouncing him as a fugitive from justice charged with murder. the temptation to return and fight it out then and there became almost overpowering. He had no fear of Hawley; indeed, physical fear had scarcely a place in his composition, but he was not as yet sufficiently fortifled with facts for the seeking of such an encounter. He could merely guess at the truth, unable to produce any proof with which to meet the gambler's certain dental.

A man came in through the office, and began climbing the stairs. He of the situation. was almost at the landing before Keith recognized him or the other glanced up.

'Ah-seen her, I suppose?' "Yes," returned Keith, not thinking have much to tell you." It worth while to mention the lady's

just come from there." "Hum-thought you'd be through by this time-fine looking girl, ain't she? -believe I'll run in and chat with her myself.

other time, Loctor," said the younger, is the same one who jostled me in the drily, "as the lady has a visitor at crowd last night."

Eirewd eyos darkening. "Ah, indeed! slouched away, Of the male sex?

I Judge so "Black Bart' Hawley." so startled his voice broke "Did he see you?" Rather; I backed him up against

the wall with a gun while I made my

But what brought him there? Are they acquainted?"

"Don't ask conundrums, Doctor. He may be your rival with the fair lady for all I know. If he is, my sympathies are all with you. Only I wouldn't try to see Miss Christie just now; I'd wait for a clearer field. Hawley is probably not in the best of humor."

Fairbain stared into the face of the speaker, uncertain whether or not he was being laughed at

"Reckon you're right," he acknowledged at last. "Tired, anyhow-been out all night-thought I'd like to see her again, though—finest looking woman I've met since I came Westremarkable eyes-well, I'll go along to

bed—see you again to morrow, Jack." Keith watched the sturdy figure stamp heavily down the hall-way, loose hoards creaking under his positive tread, and smiled to himself at the thought that he might have, infeed, become truly interested in the music hall singer. Somehow, the docter did not harmonize with the conception of love, or fit graciously into the picture. Still, stranger matings had occurred, and Cupid does not ask permission before he plays pranks with hearts. Keith turned again toward the stairs, only to observe a woman slowly cross the office and commence the ascent. She was in the shadow, her face even more deeply shaded by her hat, yet he stared at her in amazement—surely, it was Miss Maclaire! Yet how could it be? He had left that person scarcely five minutes before in "26," and this stairway was the only exit. His hand grasped the rail, his heart throbbing grangely, as a suspicion of the truth crossed his brain. Could this be Hope? Could it be that she was here also? As her foot touched the landing, she saw him, her eyes lighting up suddenly in recognition, a wave of color flooding her cheeks.

"Why, Captain Keith," she exclaimed, extending her gloved hand frankly "you have been to my room, and were roing away. I am so glad I came in

"I hardly thought to meet you." he replied, retaining her fingers in his grasp. "When did you reach Sheri-

"Only last night. I had no idea you were here until Doctor Fairbain chanced to mention your name. Then I at once begged him to tell you how exceedingly anxious I was to see you You see, I was sure you would come if you only knew I really thought you would be here this morning, and remained in my room waiting, but there were some things I actually had to have. I wasn't out ten minutes, ac you musin't think I sent you a mes-

ease and then forgot." The nature of the mistake was becoming apparent, and Keith's gray eyes smiled as they looked into the of you."

depths of the brown

"Your message had rather an amus ing result." he said, "as the doctor in formed me that Miss Christie Maclaire was the one who desired my pres

"Miss Maclaire!" her voice exhibit

ing startled surprise. "Why-why-

ch, I did forget; I never told him differently. Why, it was most ridicu-She laughed, white teeth gleaming between the parted red lips, yet not altogether happily. "Let me explain, Captain Keith, for really 1 have not been masquerading. Doctor Fairbain and I arrived upon the same train last evening. He is such a funny man but was very nice, and offered to escort me to the hotel. I remem ber new that although he introduced himself. I never once thought to mention to him my name. The town was very rough last night—the company had paid off the graders I was toldand there was no carriage, so we were compelled to walk. 1-I never saw such a mob of drunken men. One came reeling against me, and brushed aside my veil so as to see my face The doctor struck him, and then the marshal came up-you know him, Bill Hickock-and the impudent fellow actually declared he knew me, that was Christie Maclaire. I tried to explain, but they hurried me on

became confused, and forgot. Do you suppose they registered me by that name? "Outre likely; at least Fairbain still believes it was the Christie whom he

through the crowd to the hotel and I

so gallantly escorted last night." 'How provoking," her foot tapping the floor, a little wrinkle between her "It seems as though I couldn't escape that woman does she does she real's look like me?"

"At a "fatle distance, yes," he ad m orm rod face resemble story, but her hair is

darker, her eyes have a different ex- plarm pression, and she must be five or six years older."

"Do-do you know her well?" 'No, indeed; I have seen hor several times on the stage, but never met her until a few moments ago."

"A few moments ago! Do you mean she is here in this hotel?" Yes, Miss Hope, and that was what made the mistake in names so laughable. Fairbain gave me your message, but as coming from Christie. I was, of course, greatly surprised, yet responded. The lady very promptly denied having sent for me, but as I was anxious to interview her myself. we managed to drift into conversation,

but for an interruption. "Oh, indeed!" with rising inflection. He glanced quickly about, reminded

and I must have passed a half hour

there. I might have been there still,

"Yes, Hawley came in, and I would prefer not to meet him here, or have him discover you were in Sheridan. Could we not go to your room? 1

Her questioning eyes left his face, denial of having sent for him. "I have and stared down over the rail. A heavily built man, with red moustache, leaned against the clerk's desk, his

face toward them. "Do you know that man?" she asked quickly. "He followed me all the "I would advice you to select some time I was shopping. I-I believe he

Keith leaned past her to get a bet-A visitor;" his face rosy, his per view, but the fellow turned, and

"I only had a glimpse, but have no recollection of ever seeing him before.

You heard no name?" "Wild Hill called him either Scott, or Scotty-if this is the same man." Kelib's jaw set, the fighting light

burning in his eyes. That was the game." name of the fellow rooming with Willoughby, the one who seemed to be linwley's special assistant. Was he here as a spy? His hands clinched your father carried?" he asked on the rail. He was anxious to go down and wring the truth out of him, but instead, he compelled his eyes to smile, turning back to the girl.

"A mere accident probably; about my request? May I talk with you a few moments alone?"

She bowed, apparently still dissatisfled regarding his lengthy conversation with Christie, yet permitted him to follow down the hall. She held open the door of "15," and he entered



"Was Your Call Upon Miss Maclaire Very Interesting?"

silently, not wholly understanding the change in her manner. She stood before the dresser, drawing off her gloves and removing her hat.

"Will you be seated, Captain; the arm-chair by the window is the more comfortable." She turned toward him, convinced her of the justice of the almost shyly, yet with womanly curiosity which would not be stilled, "Was your call upon Miss Maclaire very interesting? Did you admire her very much ?"

Keith's eyes lifted to her face, his ears quick to detect the undertone bring him here. He would tell you in her voice.

"Interesting? yes, for I was seeking after information, and met with some success. As to the other question, I but she rose to her feet, holding forth am not sure whether I admire the lady her hands. or not. She is bright, pretty, and companionable, and in spite of her profession, at heart, I believe, a good woman. But really, Miss Hope, I was personal interest-" too deeply immersed in my purpose to give her personality much consideration. Among other things we spoke brown eyes.

"Of me? Why?" "I told her something of our adventures together; of how both Hawley and I had been confused. She was anxious to learn who you were, but unfortunately, I have never, even yet. Hope? I haven't got used to Miss heard your name."

"You have not?" "No: I left you at Fort Larned be lieving you Christie Maclaire supposing it your stage name, of course and was confirmed in this belief by finding in the holster of the saddle you had been riding an envelope bear- closer. ing that address."

"I remember; it contained the note the man brought to me from Hawley; he to the end of the chapter." he had written it that way." crossed the room, sinking down into a chair facing him. "And you have actually confused me with Christie Maclaire all this while? Have never known who I was?"

He shook his head. "I told you to call me Hope; that is my name-I am Hope Waite."

"Waite!" he leaned forward, startled by the possibility-"not-not-" Yes," she burst in, holding out her hands, clasping the locket, "and this was my father's; where did you get

He took the trinket from her, turning it over in his tingers. Little by little the threads of mystery were being unraveled, yet, even now, he could not see very far. He looked up from the locket into her questioning face. "Did I not tell you? No; then it

was an oversight. This was about the throat of one of the men I buried at Cimmaron Crossing, but-but, Hope, it was not your father." "I know," her voice choking slight-"Mrs. Murphy found that out;

that is why I am here. I heard my father came to Sheridan, and I wante! you to help me find him." He was thinking and did not answer

at once, and she went on in some "Do you know anything about him, Captain Keith? Where is he? Why

is he here? Don't be afraid to tell He pressed the locket back into her hand, retaining the latter, unresisted,

within his own. "I have not seen your father, Hope, but he was certainly here a few days ago, for Fairbain met him. They were together in the army. I am going to tell you all I know-it seems to be a tangled web, but the ends must be somewhere, although, I confess, I am

all at gea." He told it slowly and simply, bringing forth his earlier suspicion, and how he had stumbled upon facts apparently confirming them. He related ber father's robbery, his loss of valuable papers, and the conversation between Hawley and Scott which led to the suspicion that these same pahad fallen into the hands the former, and were the basis of his plot. Hope listened, breathless with interest, her widely opened eyes filled with wonder. As he concluded speaking she burst

forth: "But I don't understand in the least. Captain Keith. Why did this man Hawley send me to the Salt Fork?" "He thought he was dealing with

Christle Maciaire. He had some reason for getting her away; getting her where he could exercise influence over

"Yes-yes: but who is she?" "That is what makes the matter so know herself. Hawley is going to take advantage of her ignorance in she is the person he wishes her to represent-but who is the person? If we knew that we might block the

Both gat silent, striving to figure out some reasonable explanation.

"Do you know of any special papers

"No; none outside his business

"Has any one ever disappeared conneeted with your family? Did you

have an older sister?" "Fred and I were the only children. Why should you ask that question?" "Because something of that nature would seem to be the only rational explanation. Your brother must have told Hawley something-some family secret-which he felt could be utilized to his own advantage. Then he saw your picture, and was immediately reminded of the remarkable resemblance between you and Christie Maclaire. Evidently this discovery fitted into his plan, and made it possible for him to proceed. He has been trying ever since to get an interview with the woman, to sound her, and find out what he can do with her. He has written letters, sufficiently explicit to make it clear his scheme is based upon a will drawn, as he claims, by Christie's grandfather. No doubt by this time he has fully convinced the girl that she is the rightful heiress to property-as he stated to Scottvalued at over a million dollars. That's a stake worth fighting for, and these two will make a hard combination. He's got the papers, or claims to have. and they must be the ones stolen from your father. I have been trusting you might know something in your family history which would make it all plain.'

"But I do not," decisively. "You must believe me; not so much as a hint of any secret has ever reached me. There are only the four of us, Father, Mother, Fred, and I. I am sure there can be no secret; nothing which I would not know. Perhaps, if

I could see Miss Maclaire-" "I am convinced that would be use less," he interrupted, rising, and pacing across the floor. "If Hawley has claim, he will also have pledged her to secrecy. He is working out of sight like a mole, for he knows the fraud, and will never come to the surface until everything is in readiness. know a better way; I'll find Fred, and whatever it was he told Hawley, and

that will give us the clue." He picked up his hat from the table

"I cannot thank you enough, Captain Keith," she exclaimed frankly. "You are doing so much, and with no

"Oh, but I have." The long lashes dropped over the

"What do you mean?"

"That I have a personal interest-in

you, Hope." She stood silent, her bosom rising and falling to rapid breathing. "You don't mind my calling

Walte yet." Her eyes met his swiftly. Of course, not. Such ceremony would be foolish after all you have

done for me. Do-do you call her Christie? He laughed, clasping her hands

"I assure you no-she is strictly Miss Maclaire, and," solemnly, "shall "Oh, well, I didn't care, only that

was what you called her when you were telling me what she said. Are you going?" "Yes, to find Fred; the sooner we

CHAPTER XXIV.

can get this straightened out, the bet-

A Mistake in Assassination. Let his future be what it might, Jack Keith would never again forget the girl who held the door open for his passage with one hand, her other clasped in his, interested before, yet forcing himself into indifference new that he knew who she really was, the man made full surrender. It was a struggle that kept him from clasping the slender figure in his arms, and pouring forth the words of tenderness which he sternly choked back. This was neither the time, nor the place, et his eyes must have spoken, for Hope's glance rell, and her cheeks grew crimson.

"I do not need to pledge you to return this time; do 17" she questioned, her voice trembling

"No," he answered, "nor any time-

again." The hall was deserted, but a men leitered in the office. Kerth recognized none of the faces, and did not stop to make any inquiries of the clerk. It was growing dark, the lights already burning, and from the plashing of drops on the window, it must be raining outside. Hawley would surely have ended his call upon Miss Maclaire long before this, and left the hotel. However Interesting his communication might have proven, she must fill her evening engagement at the Trocadero, and would require time for supper and rest. As to the result of that interview there could be little doubt. Providing the gambler possessed the proper papers he would have small difficulty in convincing the girl that she was indeed the one sought. Keith had probed sufficiently tate her mind to feel assured that her inclination was to side with Hawley. Under all the circumstances this was natural enough, and he did not blame

He glanced into the bar-room as he passed, not in any anticipation, but merely from the vigilance which becomes second nature upon the fron-Hawley stood leaning against the bar, where he could see any one passing through the hall. The eyes of the two men met, but the gambler never moved, never changed his attitude, although Keith noted that his right hand was hidden beneath the skirts of his long coat. The plainsman drew back, facing his enemy, until he reached the outer door. There was a speer on Hawtey's dark sinkshard to unravel. She doesn't even ter face like an tayloation, but a memony of the girl he had just left, and or dependence upon him, caused Kein to avoid an encounter. would fight this affair out in a differ- for." As the door opened and he against a man apparently just entering. The gleam of light fell for an in tant upon the face of the other-it was Scotty with the red moustache.

They had been watching for him then-what for? Hawley on the inride, and this man Scott without, were waiting to determine when he left the hotel; would probably dog his you can't name the poor devil." ocisteps to discover where he went. Sipped back into the shadow of the steps, his eyes on the door of the falling, the streets almost deserted, and passed on. Keith hung back, hop ppearing sodden and miserable saleon windows. One or two men, and hats drawn low over their eyes, climbed the sickety steps and went in, but no one came out. Perhaps he those fellows; they may have desired murely to know when he left, or and saw him. Scott's return just at that moment might have been an accident. To be better try-you might know him. sure, the hotel possessed a back exit, but he could not cover both ends or the suilding, and must take his shoulder into his throat, and a blur chances. It was too wet and disagree- obscured his right. He swept a hand able to remain crouched there, now over his eyes and dropped on his that it was evident there was no in- knows into the mud beside the body, tention of following him. With hand staring speechless into the white face, on the butt of his gan, suspicious and the sightless eyes. Hickock watchwatchful, yet with scarcely a faster ing him closely and gripped his arm. beat to his heart, Keith straightened up, and began splashing his way through the mud down the street. He knew where Willoughby would be most likely found at this hour-with cronies at the "Tenderfoot" and he meant to discover the boy, and make him confess to liope the truth. Matters had now reached a point where longer delay was dangerous.

Sheridan was reemingly dead, the long street silent gloomy, black, except for those streams of saloon light shining across pools of water. He stumpled over the irregular ground, occasionally striking patches of wooden sidewalk or a strip of cinders. Here and there a tent flapped in the wind, which drove the drizzle into his face; comewhere ahead a swinging sign mouned as if in agony. A few wanderers ploughed through the muck. dim uncertain shapes appearing and vanishing in the gloom. He had gone a block and over, the struggle against the elements leaving him forgetful of all else, when a man reeled out of some dimly lit shack to his right, and staggered drunkenly forward a few feet in advance. He could barely distinguish the fellows's outlines, giving little thought to the occurrence, for the way was unusually black along there, the saloon opposite having shades drawn. Suddenly a flash of red fire spurted into the night, with a sharp report. It was so close at hand

it blinded him, and he flung up one arm over his eyes, and yet, in that single instant, he perceived the whole picture as revealed by the red flame. He saw the man in front go down in a heap, the projection of the building from behind which the shot came, the end of a wagon sticking forth into the street which had concealed the assassin. The blinding flash, the shock of that sudden discharge, for a moment held him motionless; then he leaped forward, revolver in hand, sprang around the end of the wagon, and rushed down the dark alley between two buildings. He could see nothing, but some one was running tecklessly ahead of him, and he fired in the direction of the sound, the leaping spurt of flame yielding a dim outline of the fugutive. Three times he pressed the trigger; then there was nothing to shoot at-the fellow had faded away into the black void of prairie. Keith stood there haffled. staring about into the gloom, the smoking revolver in his hand. The sound of men's voices behind was all that reached him, and feeling the uselessness of further pursuit, he retraced his way back through the nar-

A group was gathered about the body in the rain, a single lantern glimmering. Two or three men had started down the passageway, and Keith met them, revolvers drawn and suspicious. "Who are you?" snapped one

"Were you doing all that sharply. shooting yonder?" Keith recognized the voice, thank-

ful that he did so "I fired at the fellow, but he got away onto the prairie. I reckon you

couldn't have done any better, Bill." 'Jack Keith!" and Hickock's voice had a new tone, his hand dropping on the other's shoulder. "Never was gladder to meet a fellow in my life. Boys, this is an old deputy of mine down in Dodge. When he gives up chasin' a murderer there isn't much use our trvin'. Let's go back, and find cut how had the fellow is hurt. While we're feelin' our way, Jack, you might tell us what you know about this at-

"It was just the flash of a gun, and the man dropped," Keith explained, briefly. "I was ten or a dozen feet behind and the fellow fired from under the wagon there. He must have been laying for some one-I reckon, maybe, it was me."

"You? Then it's likely you have

some notion who he was?" "Well, if I have, Bill," and Keith's lips were set tight, "I'm not liable to tell you. If it's the lad I think likely, I'll attend to the case myself. You understand-this is my personal af-

Hickock nodded, his hand again pressing the other's shoulder.

"Sure, Jack, if you feel that way There's enough doing here in Sheridan to keep a marshal reasonably busy, without dippin' into private matters. I rather reckon you can take care of yourself, but if you need me, old boy, I'm always right here on the job. You know that." "I do. Bill, and appreciate it."

The group about the motionless body fell away, and made room for the marshal, the last man to rise saying scherly:

"He's dead all right, Hickock, guess he never knew what hit him. Good shootin', too, dark as it is here.' "Had the range fixed, likely," re-

He makes it look like it was arranged He bent down, striving to distinslipped forth into the gloom, he brush guish the dead man's features turned up to the drizzle, but the night re-

turned the marshal. "That's what

vealed only the faintest outline. "Anybody know him?" There was no response, only a shuffling of feet in the mud. "Here, you man with the lantern, hold it over where I can see There, that is better. Now, you fellows take a look, and see if some of

They glanced down, one after the Keith loosened his revolver, so as to other, over Bill's shoulder, shading be assured he could draw quickly, and their eyes from the rain so as to see clearer. The light of the flickering lantern streamed full on the ghastly el. There was a cola, drizzly rain face, but each man shook his head has some one would identify the body waste the lights shone forth through and not make it necessary for him to take part in the grewsome task. It ecking supper, coat collars turned up was not likely to be any one he knew, and besides, he felt the man had died in his stead, and he dreaded to look upon the stricken face. When the last was militaken as to the purpose of of the group had drifted back out of the radius of light, Hickock looked up

"Here, Jack," he said, gravely, "you

Reith bent over and looked down. As he did so his heart seemed to rise

"What is it? Do you know him?" "My God, yes; Fred Willoughby!"

CHAPTER XXV.

A Reappearance of the General. Keith did not inform Hope of her grin, and say ober de same ting. brother's death until the following morning, but had the body properly prepared for burial, and devoted the remainder of the night to searching better settle up widout no fightin'. for General Waite, and, incidentally, for both Hawley and Scott. Both talked so low like." Hickock and Fairbain assisted in this effort to learn the whereabouts of the dead hoy's father, but without the slightest result, nor did Keith's investigations reveal the gambler at any of ber call him Hawley-no, sah, not Machine. his accustomed resorts, while Scott once; he done call him Bartlett, or had apparently made a complete getaway. These disappearances merely served to convince him as to the truth of his first suspicious; Scott might have departed for good, but Hawley would certainly reappear just as soon as assured his name had not been ob de ol' man swearin' at him, an' its mentioned in connection with the grabbed a picter out ob he's pocket, tragedy. To Neb alone did the plains an' says, 'Damn you; look at dat man candidly confide his belief in the What kind ob a fight can yo' make possible reappearance of either.

should offer, Keith returned to the before any jury yo're mind to get-on, | FOUNTAIN PENS AT PREE PRESS.

Hope. Although still comparatively early, some premonition of evil had awakened the girl, and in a very few moments she was prepared to receive her visitor. A questioning glance into his face was sufficient to assure her of unpleasant news, but, with one quick breath, she grasped his arm as though his very presence afforded her strength.

"How tired you look! Something has occurred to keep you out all night -and-and I know you have broume bad news. Don't be afraid to will me; I can bear anything better than

suspense. Is it about father?" 'No, Hope," and he took her hand, and led her to a chair. Bending above her he gave her the whole story of the night, and she scarcely interrupted with a question, sitting there dry-eyed, with only an occasional sob shaking her slender form. As he ended, she looked up into his face, and now he could see a mist of unshed tears in

"What shall I do, Captain Keith? I am all alone with this, except for you.

"I have considered that, Hope," he answered, gravely, "and it seems to me your present duty is more to the living than the dead. You should romain here until we learn something definite regarding your father, and discover the truth of this conspiracy formed against him. If Fred could know the trouble his chance words have caused, he would wish you to do this. With him gone, we are going to find the unravelling harder than ever. It is my judgment, Hope, your broth-

er should be buried here." She shuddered, her bands pressed

to her eyes. "Oh, on that horrible Boots Hill" "Only temporarily, little girl," his voice full of deepest sympathy a few weeks, perhaps, it could be re-

moved East." She was silent for what seemed to him a long while; then she looked up into his face, clinging to his arm.

"Yes," she said, "that will be best." That same afternoon, the sun low in the west, they placed the dead boy in his shallow grave on "Boots Hill. It was a strange funeral, in a strange environment-all about the barren, doserted plains; far away to the coat and west, the darker line marking the railroad grade, and just below, nestled close in against the foot of the hill, the squalfd town of tents and shacks. There were not many to stand beside the oven grave, for few in Sheridan knew the lad, and funerals were not uncommen-some cronies, half-drunk and maudlin, awed somewhat by the presence of the marshal, Doctor Fairbain, Keith and Hope. That was all excepting the post chaplain from Fort Hays, who, inspiried by a glimpse of the girl's unveiled face, spoke simple words of comfort. It was all over with quickly, and with the red sun still lingering on the horizon, the little party slowly wended their way back, down the steep trail into the one long street of Sheridan.

At the hotel Neb was waiting, tho whites of his eyes shining with excitement, his patomime indicating important news. As soon as he could leave Hope, Keith hurrried down to interview his dusky satellite, who appeared about to burst with restrained information. As soon as uncorked that individual began to flow volubly; "I sho' done seed 'em. Massa Jack; I done seed 'em both.'

"Both? Both who?" 'Massa Walte sah an' dat black debble dat we was huntin' for'. It was a mos surprisin' circumstance, sah—a mos surprisin' circumstance." "Well, go on; where did you see them? Do you mean they were to-

gether?" The negro took a long breath, evidently overcome by the importance of his message, and unable to conjure up words wholly satisfactory to his

"It sho' am de strangest ting, Massa Jack, ebber I prognosticated. I was jest comin' roun' de corner ob Sheeny Joe's shebang, back dar by do blacksmith shop, when-de Lawd save me!-yere come of Massa Waite. a ridin' long on a cream colo'd pinto just as much alibe as obber he was cussin' he hoss, when he done shy at a man what got up sudden like from a cart wheel he was settin' on. Ic. e took one look at dat secon' fellar, and seed it was dat black debble from down Carson way. Den I ducked intade blacksmith chon out 'er sight. I sho' didn't want Mister Hawley to git no chance at dis nigger - I sho' didn't. "Did they speak to one another."

Keith asked, anxiously, "Did you hear what was said?" "Sho' dey talked, Massa Jack, sorter reckon dey was dar for dat special purpose. Sutt'nly, sah, dey went right at talkin' like dey had som't'ing on dey minds. Ol' Massa Waite was a sittin' straight up on de hoss, an' dat black debble was a standin' dar in front ob him. Of Massa Waite he was mad from de first jump off, an' I could heah most eberyting he said, but Mr. Hawley he grin de same way he do when he deni faro, an' speaks kinder low Do c! man he swear fine at him, he call him cheryting-a damn line, a damn scoundrel-but Mr. Hawley he jest

"What was that, Neb?" "Som Ung bout a gal, Massa Jack -nn' a law suit-an' how de ol' man I jest didn't git de whole ob it, he

"What did Walte say?" Well, mostly he jest cussed. He sho' told dat black debble 'bout what he thought ob him, but he didn't nebcomet'ing or odder like dat. But he suttinly read dat man's pedigree from way back to de time of de flood, I reck'n. An' he done swore he'd fight for whatebber it was, papers or no papers. Den Hawley, he got plumb tired guilt of these two, and when other against dat face?' De of man stared duties called him elsewhere, he left at it a while, sorter chokin' up; den he negro scouring the town for any he say softer like: 'It's Hope; where did yo' ebber get dat?' and de black Heavy-eyed from lack of sleep, debble he laughed, an shoved de pic heavy-hearted with his message, yet ter back into he's pocket. Hope, hell! ully decided as to what advice he he say, "it's Phyllis, an' I'll put he

hotel, and requested an interview with I've got yo' nailed, Waite, dis time."

"Was that all?"

"De of gin'ral he didn't seem ter know what ter say; he done set dar lookin' off ober de prairie like he was clar flumegasted. He sho' did look like dat black debbie hed hit him mighty hard. Den he says slow like, turnin' his hoss 'round: 'Bartlett, yo' am puttin' up a good bluff, but, by Gawd, I'm goin' ter call yo'. Yo' don't get a cent ob dat money 'less yo' put up de proof. I'll meet yo' whar yo' may, but er I can git hol' ob some papers dat's missin' I'll take dat grin off yo' face.' De odder one laughed, an' de ol' gin'ral started fo' ter ride away, den he pull up he's hoss, an' look 'Yo' sorter herd wid dat kind ob cattle, Partlett, he say, sharp like, 'maybe yo' know a gambler roup' yere called Hawley?' De black debule nebber eben lose he's grin. mean Black Bart Hawley?' 'Dat's the man, where is he?" 'Dealin' fare fo' Mike Kenna in Topeka a week agotriend ob yours?' 'Dat's none ob yo' damned business,' snorted de oil gin'ral, givin' his hoss do spur. Sho', Massa Jack, he nebber knowed he was talkin' ter dat same Hawley, an' dat black debble jest laughed as he rodo

"When was all this, Neb?

off.

" 'Hout de time yo' all went up on de hill, I reck'n. I done come right yere, and walted." Keith walked across the room, se-

lected a cigar, and came back, his mind busy with the problem. Hawley had In some manner, then, got into communication with Waite, and was threatening him. But Waite evidently knew the men under another namehis given name-and the gambler had sent him off on a false trail. The lost papers apparently contained the solution to all this mystery. Waite believed Hawley possessed them, but did not suspect that Bartlett and Hawloy were the same person. What would be most parerally do now? Seck Hawley in Topeka probably; seize the first opportunity of getting

'Any train running east?"

Well, they generally start one out every day," with a glance toward tha clock, "long bout this time. Maybe it's gone, and maybe it hasn't."

there. Kelth turned impatiently to

It was already nearly dark outside as the two men hastened toward the depot. They arrived there barely in time to see the red lights on the last car disappear. No inquities made of those lounging about brought results -they had been interested in a lot of drunken graders loaded on the flat cars by force, and sent out under mand-and not one could tell whether any man answering Walte's description was in the single passenger coach. Convinced, however, that the General would waste no time in prosecuting his search. Keith helieved him already on his way east, and after dismissing Neb, with instructions to watch out closely for Hawley, he made his own way back to the hotel. It seemed strange enough how com-

pletely he was blocked each time, just

as he thought the whole haffling mys-

tery was about to be made clear. He wley was playing in rare luck, all the cards running easily to his hand, thus, at least, gaining time, and strengthening his position. There could no long or be any doubt that the gambier pos nessed come knowledge which made dim a formidable adversary. From Waite's statement it was the loss of he papers which left him helpless to openly resist the claim being made non him on behalf of the mysterious Phyllis. His only hope, therefore, lay in recovering these; but, with time limited, he had been sent back on a wild goose chase, while Keith alone knew, with any degree of positiveness. where those documents really were Pawley certainly had them in his possession the day before, for he had taken them to Miss Machine to thus convince her as to the truth of his statements. And Hawley was still in Sheridan. However, it was not likely the man would risk carrying documents of such value, and documents connecting him so closely with that murder on the Santa Fe Trail about upon his person. At best, life was chean in that community, and Black Bart must policess enemies th Yet if not on his personwhere? Scott was only a tool, a mere ignorant desperado, not to be trusted to such a degree-yot apparently he was the only one working with the gambler in this deal, the only one cognizant as to his plans. Christie-Keith came to a stop in the street at the recurrence of the woman's name. Why not? If she had been convinced, if she really believed that these papers proved her right to both property and parentage, then she would guard them as a tigress does her young. And Hawley would know that, and must realize they would be far safer in her hands than in his pock t. She could not use them without his nil and guidance, and yet, whatever happened to him they would still be safely beyoud reach. True, this might not have been done; the number might not yet have left that he had sufficient hold upon the woman to trust her thus far, but it was, at least, a possibility to be

considered, and noted upon. Sill was stling with the intricate problem. Keith entered the dinkur room, and weaved his way, as usual through the a levellaneous crowd, toward the more exclusive tables at the renr. A woman sat alone at one of these, her back toward the door. His first thought was that it must be Hope, and he advanced toward her. his heart throbbing. She glanced HD. a slight frown wrinkling her foreball and he bowed, recognizing Christie

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